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Chapter 11 - Developing Printed Forms of Fiction

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Developing Printed Forms of Fiction

- Audrey Jones -

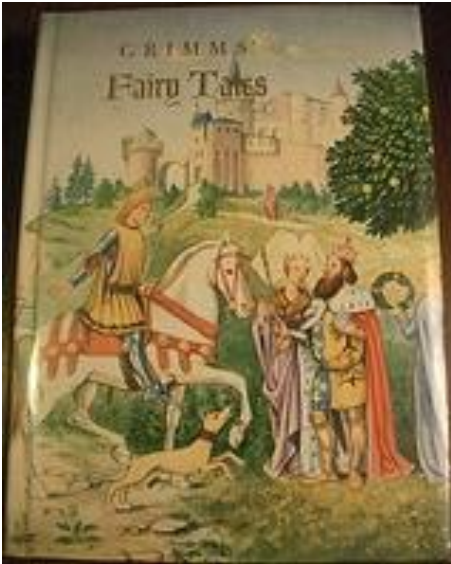
Literature has evolved in a multitude of ways over the years, ranging from the humble origins of early book forms - such as scrolls and codices - to the increasing versatility of forms such as heavy bound encyclopedias and cheap paperbacks. Over the course of history, the growing possibilities for uses of the book have opened up many new markets for consumers. These have changed the way that the general populace interacts with printed materials and their suppliers, including publishing companies and authors. As the rise of lending libraries led to a greater demand for entertainment in the form of fiction, more marketing opportunities opened up within that broad genre. In the late 18th and 19th centuries, this resulted in the emergence in popularity of several notable literary forms. These various developing printed forms each had their own effect on the market, society, and culture in which they existed.

The Market for Printed Fiction

As printed material became more accessible, literacy rates began to go up, and as more people became literate, more people became interested in reading fiction as a form of entertainment¹. With an increase in consumers reading for pleasure, a greater need developed for various specific *types* of reading material in order to cater to the growing literary audience. This instigated the creation of new markets within the arena of authoring and publishing, contributing further to the field and continuing changes which resonated forward in history; this influenced new genres, new perceptions, societal issues, and the overall market for fiction. For example, the fairytales popularized by the Grimm brothers became widely known only after they were made more accessible in the form of printed books. Innovations such as the

serialization of novels and the introduction of cheap and compelling dime novels reached out to a greater audience through the type of medium in which they were printed. The accessibility that these provided to the growing world of readers became an important part of the developing book and of literature.

The Brothers Grimm



Grimm's Fairy Tales ¹

The Grimms' Fairy Tales, first compiled in the late 19th century, brought together a multitude of German folktales. Up until this point, the folktales were primarily conveyed through the oral tradition of story-telling. Any written record would have been informal and private. Brothers Jacob and Wilhelm took on the project in order to preserve and unify the traditional stories and the culture within the Germanic community².

The Grimm brothers began collecting the folktales that they would eventually publish while still in their teenage years².

Before the brothers came along, the stories were well-known but confined within a single culture and society. While the tales might have endured in this secluded setting from which they originated, it took collecting and publishing to get them out into the world and before the eyes of many avid readers. Without the creation of this record, the folklore could have been lost forever, or at the very least would never have spread far beyond its roots and would have existed only as stories passed down within families and small communities. This publication also allowed for these stories to be retold orally in other nations, providing a transportation service of sorts. The Grimm brothers facilitated this wide-spread growth in accessibility. In doing so, they immortalized what is now seen as universally appealing content, a collection of fairytales and folklore which is so well-known and frequently told, retold, and adapted into various other mediums.

By spreading these folktales outside of the culture they originated in, Jacob and Wilhelm were able to assist in meeting the growing need for reading material. Libraries, bookstores, and the general populace were now allowed access to these stories and were able to build upon their literary repertoire. The Grimm brothers helped to meet this demand by bringing stories into the format of printed fiction from that of oral storytelling. The increased accessibility that this transition of forms provided allowed for the traditional folk culture to spread its influence across other literary disciplines and ingrain itself in the folklore and children's tales of other nations³. The impacts can be seen today, as these fairytales have persisted throughout history. While they have been revised and censored many times over, they still appear in some form throughout our children's stories and are constantly being adapted into new forms of entertainment.

Serialization of Novels

The serialization of novels first began in the early 18th century. This involved the publication of fictional works in parts, rather than producing an entire story at once. By this method, readers would receive their stories in installments, through mediums such as newspapers or magazines which were published periodically. This serial fiction was often provided as part of a subscription service for the material in which it was printed, meaning that a novel that went on and on over a great period of time could end up costing the reader a great deal of money – as well as making more money for the publishers and the author⁴.

This serial format for the distribution of fiction created a new avenue through which authors could draw in the reader and potentially achieve greater success in their writing. The method of publishing created the necessity for writers to create engaging content with suspenseful endings in order to capture and maintain the interest of their audience throughout the weeks, months, or

other specified intervals between publications. As for the readership, consumers in this market were granted a new way to enjoy fiction specifically for entertainment purposes. For some, it was a more convenient way of acquiring reading materials; the serial novels would be regularly distributed to the readers under the subscription service, rather than an individual having to go to the bookstore or library for an entire book every time they wanted something to read.

Publishing entrepreneurs such as W. F. Tillotson took advantage of the industry for serial fiction. He took over his father's printing firm and incorporated Tillotson's Fiction Bureau into the preexisting Bolton News network in England⁴. Newspapers and other publishing mediums that were already successful had the opportunity to increase their success by taking advantage of the serialized fiction market, meeting the demands of the audience that would already be in place. The financial opportunities provided by periodical fiction could greatly benefit the backing printing and publishing entities, economically and in popularity. Authors were also given another method through which to expose their writing. It was potentially more financially practical for them to publish their stories piece by piece – if they could keep their novel in the paper for long enough. This changed the entire way the business worked. In addition to affecting the method of writing and production, the quality, content, and style were also influenced.

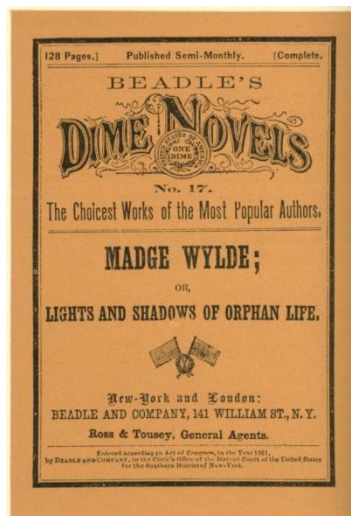
The serialization of fiction which began around the 18th century influenced the market for years to come. The effects are not only lasting, but have also evolved into many different forms of media. Within the realm of books, many novels which were originally serialized in periodicals were later put together into one singular form and distributed as such at different prices; *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are a couple of examples which have remained popular as a part of well-known literature⁵. Book series and films are often serialized in order to maintain the audience's interest and

bring in continued revenue, as well as satisfy the demand for continuation and elaboration of certain story lines.

Dime Novels

Dime novels were a cheap form of fiction popularized in the 19th century, produced using inexpensive materials and processes in order to create a product that was widely affordable to the general public⁶. Beadle's Dime Novels (as pictured below) was a major publishing company for dime novels in America. Known as dime novels in many areas, this phenomenon of popular material at appealingly low prices did exist in many countries throughout the world. The British counterparts to dime novels were known as "penny dreadfuls" (also pictured below); similarly priced and composed, they were sold at the price of one penny. Popular genres in other areas, such as detective novels in Russia, also followed these same parameters; though not called "dime novels," they were mass-produced in similar forms in order to satisfy the consumer demand⁷.

Piracy and plagiarism ran rampant in the production of dime novels, as authors and publishers looked for quick ways to produce a story.



Beadle's Dime Novels – Madge Wylde 1861 ²



Spring Heeled Jack: The Terror of London - "Price One Penny" ³

The format and content of these books drew readers in through low prices and exciting stories; cheap and accessible, they were both widely distributed and widely read.

Dime novels in America were primarily geared toward the younger working-class. The subject matter was not deeply complex literary content, and was written to be exciting and crowd-pleasing. Because of this, differences in class and economic status were further accentuated by the popularity of dime novels. These issues influenced a divide between those thought of as more educated and well-off, and those who might be factory workers and who enjoyed reading cheap sensational fiction for entertainment⁸. At this time, there was also a large reader base and resulting demand for this type of fiction among women; these stories were primarily read by the young working-class, as well as middle-aged and older females. These dime novels were mostly domestic and romantic in genre, meant to appeal to the experiences and fantasies of the average young woman or housewife at the time⁹.

The low cost of books like dime novels allowed them to be used for many purposes, such as distributing political propaganda and anti-governmental literature. For example, in pre-WWI Germany, radical anti-socialism and anti-government texts were widely produced. They



Freisinnige Zeitung, 1892 ⁴

The Sozialdemokratische Zukunftsbilder was a cheap fictional novel authored by Eugen Richter; the title translates to “Scenes of the Social Democratic Future.” The medium in which it was published, “Freisinnige Zeitung,” translates to “Freethinkers’ News”¹⁰.

Zukunftsbilder marketed in the manner of the dime novel which was freely handed out to 300 factory workers; this marketing strategy got the words out there quickly, making it highly accessible. It also created the potential for change in attitudes of the general populace as well as influencing the politically inexperienced¹⁰. This accessibility and opportunity for the rapid and wide-spread dissemination of information would not have been possible without the format of the dime novel.

Mass Production of Fiction

The increase in books and other reading material based on the developing literary forms that have been discussed meant greater access to these books and rising literacy rates, which in turn increased the demand for books¹¹. In order to meet this growing demand, publishing companies and authors felt pressured to rapidly produce material to be marketed and sold, exploring the various genres at their disposal and the relative success rates. The engaging content that typically resulted from this mass-production encouraged a greater reader base, especially among young adults. However, among the “intellectual elite,” the content was seen as more of indulgent entertainment rather than complex literature.

Going forward with the intent of quickly pleasing readers on a large scale encouraged quick production and allowed for massive sales in popular works. In this instance, the wide-spread distribution of fiction became all about the marketing strategies, and what it would take to meet and satisfy the demands of the reader. Regardless of the method of publication, the aim was to please and to make sales¹. This rapid exploration of what would or wouldn't sell resulted in the emergence and recognition of popular genres which appealed to a wide reader-base. By testing the reception of so much mass-produced reading material, publishers were able to identify what would be successful. These results have helped pave the way for future publications and

authors, and formulaic stories geared toward drawing in large numbers of readers can still be seen in many books today.

Influences of the Rise of Fiction

Throughout all the printed forms of fiction that have been discussed in this chapter, the overarching theme is accessibility. We can see how the world of literature as we know it would certainly not have been the same without the development of various forms of the book and fiction. By creating new ways of acquiring and producing stories, authors and publishers disrupted the market for reading material and in many instances changed not only *how* it would be accessed by consumers, but *who* would be able to do so as well. The developing forms of printed fiction contributed to the massive spread of information and literacy over many cultures, societies, and economic classes.

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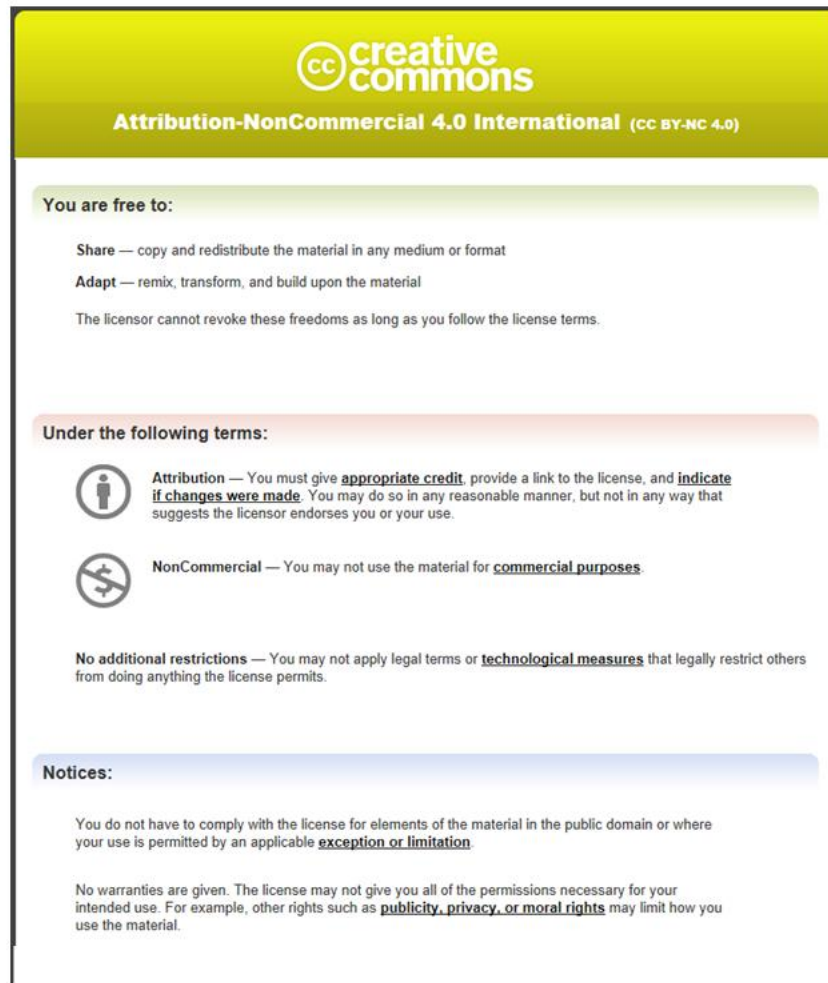
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